DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 492 FL 027 252

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TITLE T/V Forms between Husband and Wife in the Nepali Language.
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Foreign Countries; *Language Usage; *Nepali; *Pronouns; Sex Differences; *Spouses; Uncommonly Taught Languages
IDENTIFIERS *Address Forms; Nepal

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the pronominal system of address between spouses in Nepal. Nepal has eight pronouns corresponding to the t/v distinction, some of which are honorific, and some of which are non-honorific. According to the degree of respect implied, they are massif, sarkaar, hajur, yahaaN, TapaiiN, aaphu, Timi, and TaN. Massif and sarkaar are the rigid forms, reserved for use by the royal family, and are only used ironically among common Nepal couples. Timi and TaN are non-honorific, and the other four are honorific. Husbands use non-honorific forms to address their wives, while wives use honorific forms to address their husbands. Reciprocal use of either form except Timi is nonexistent. The form TaN is never used by a wife to her husband except in extremely emotional cases. A husband never uses an honorific form to his wife except ironically. The forms of address to the husband change as his social status upgrades, while forms of address to the wife never change. The determining factor is not age, sex, cast, post, academic qualification, or financial condition. The social norm that a wife is inferior to her husband is the determining factor in pronoun use between Nepalese couples. (SM)

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T/V Forms between Husband and Wife in the Nepali Language

- Vishnu S Rai

I

A speaker selects special form of language regarding the situation he is talking in, or the person he is addressing to. The purpose of this study is to focus on the latter, i.e. to describe the pronominal system of address in Nepali, and more specifically why a particular form of address is selected between Nepali spouses.

The pronouns of address in Nepali is many and varied. Unlike most European languages, Nepali has not only two pronouns that correspond to the t/v distinction but a lot more. Nepali has altogether eight pronouns of address, some of which are honorific and some non-honorific. According to the degree of respectability they are as follows.

1. mousuph
2. sarkaar
3. hajur
4. yahaaN
5. TapaaiN
6. aaphu
7. Timi
8. TaN

Mousuph and *sarkaar* are the rigid forms reserved to be used by or for the royal family. These two forms are not in use between common Nepali couples. However, they may sometimes be used ironically among them. If a husband, for example, addresses his wife with the form *sarkaar* in such expression as,

Sarkaar li baksios ([you please] take),

it simply means he is teasing his wife. The wife, on the other hand, may take it as her husband being angry or playful.

Rest six pronouns can be divided into two groups as shown below.

honorific	non-honorific
hajur	Timi
yahaaN	TaN
TapaaiN	
aaphu	

Husbands use non-honorific forms to their wives and receive honorific forms from them. Reciprocal use of either form except *Timi* is non-existent. The different forms that are used among Nepali spouses are shown on Table 1.

Note: the transliteration of the sounds used in the pronouns are:

A = as in English word 'cut'
aa = as in English word 'bath
T = dental /t/
N = mark for nasalization

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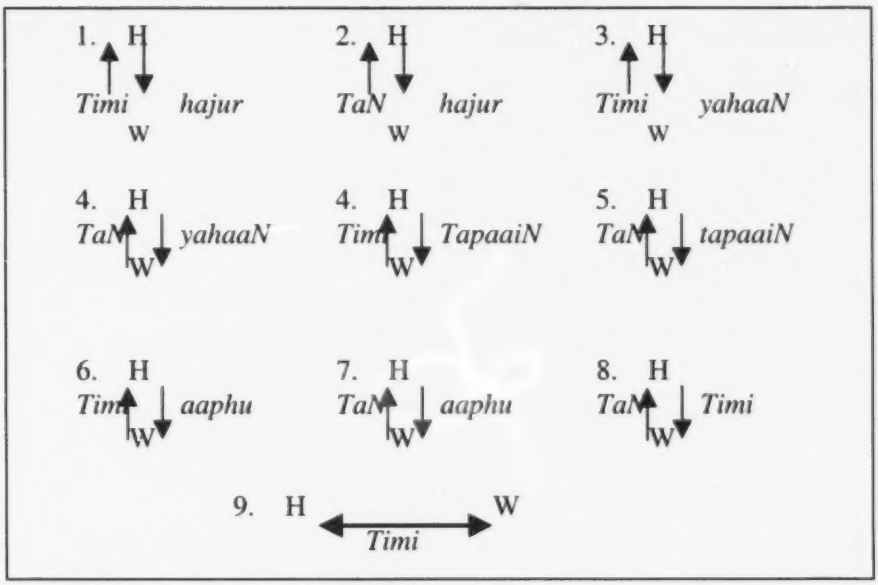


Table 1

The forms *Timi/hajur* and *TaN/hajur* are used by those couples who belong to the upper class and tend to think themselves as elite. Their desire to make themselves distinct from others leads them to use these forms. The most common form which is exchanged between Nepali couples is *Timi/TapaaiN*. This is the most frequently used form among lower middle class couples. *TaN/TapaaiN* form is mostl used among the lower class couples though its use among lower middle clas couples should not be taken as a surprising factor. *Timi/aaphu* and *TaN/aaphu* are the forms that are found in use among certain groups of people in Easter Nepal, and among those who live in north Indian boarder. The only form that is mutually exchanged is *Timi*. It is found in use among those who live in Darjeeling, India: very few couples mutually exchange it in Nepal.

The form *TaN* is never used by a wife to her husband, however it may be found in use in extremely emotional cases. When a husband, for example, beats his wife (a sad but common feature in most Nepalese families of lower class), the wife may use this non-honorific form, *TaN* to her husband, otherwise in no case she is entitled to use it. Similarly, a husband never uses an honorific form to his wife except ironically.

It is also interesting to note that the addressing forms to husband change with the upgrading of his social status but addressing to the wife remains the same even if her social status goes upwards. For example, a wife starts using *yahaaN* in place of *TapaaiN* as the her husband is promoted, say from a clerk to a section officer, and this form *yahaaN* is replaced with *hajur* when he becomes a chief district officer or an under secretary. By contrast, a husband uses the same from *TaN* or *Timi* whatever he was using even if the social position of his wife goes up. Table 2 shows this phenomenon.

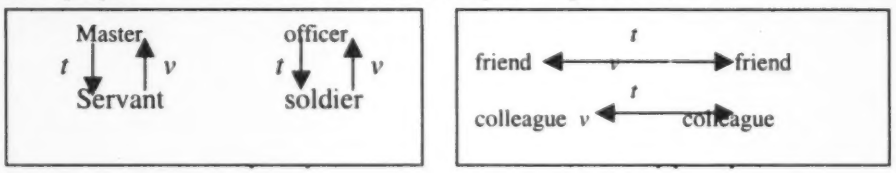
Clerk	section officer	chief district officer
H	H	H
Timi TapaaiN	*Timi yahaaN*	*Ttimihajur*
W	W	W

Table 2

II

Most languages have t/v distinction in their pronominal system of address. They correspond to the t/v/ distinction in French which has a singular you *tu* and plural you, *vous*. Brown and Gilman (1960) maintain that this t/v distinction began as a genuine difference between *t* singular and *v* plural. *t* form became more informal to be used with the intimates while *v* form to be used with unknown ones. They explain this phenomenon on the basis of the principle of power and solidarity.

Power principle takes account of the relationship between higher and lower classes. Those who are powerful use *t* form to the powerless, and receive *v* form from them. Solidarity principle maintains that when people feel intimate towards each other, they exchange mutual *t* or *v*.



These explanation, as we shall see are not fully applicable to the Nepali form of address between husband and wife. If we classify Neplai pronouns of address following the t/v distinction, then *Timi* and *TaN* fall into the *t* category and the rest into the *v* group. Since Nepali husband always use *t* category, we ask ourselves is a husband more powerful than wife? and if yes then in what sense, because power can reflect in cast, class, age, in sheer physical strength or in financial and/or academic superiority. Is a husband more powerful than his wife in the same sense as a master to his servant, and an officer to a soldier? The answer is obviously no. The relationship between husband and wife is not the same as the relationship between the master and servant. Mater/servant or officer/soldier relationship is formal and remote, whereas husband/wife relationship is informal and intimate. This intimacy, according to the solidarity principle demands that they should exchange mutual *t* or *v*, but what is found is just opposite among Nepali couples: their relation is intimate but their addressing is very formal.

Borwn, R. & Gilaman, A. *The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity* in Giglioli, P. (Ed) Language and Social Context, Penguin, 1972.

A Nepali husband seems to be more powerful which is why he uses non-honorific form to his wife and receive honorific form from her. However, the power has nothing to do with age, cast education, physical strength or financial position. An example of a couple can be cited here: husband and wife both are lecturers. Both are financially independent, and both have doctoral degree. The wife is in no way dependant on her husband. She is not inferior to her husband in any sense. Both are equal in every respect and yet they do not use mutual *t* or *v* form. The form which is used between them is *Timi/hajur* – the most formal one. Recently, she has been promoted (and her husband is one rank below her), nevertheless she still uses honorific form to her husband and receive non-honorific form from him.

Does this mean that males are more powerful than the females in Nepali society? Is sex the determining factor for this kind of use of addressing forms? An observation reveals the fact that sex is a not a determining factor for this kind of use because mutual exchange of *v* form is found between male and female (e.g. between class friends of opposite sexes and colleagues). Sex is not the determining factor is also proved by the fact that an elder sister, or an aunt can use *t* form to her brother/or nephew and receive v form from him. The following table shows it.

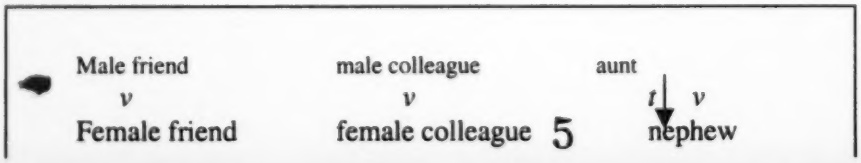


Table 5

The determining factor, therefore, is not sex, age, cast, post, academic qualification or financial condition. The social norm that a wife is inferior to her husband in Nepali society is the determining factor of this kind of use of pronouns of address between Nepali couples. In Nepali society, husband is regarded as the God. He might be younger than his wife, physically weak or academically poor, may be form a lower cast and in lower post than that of his wife, yet he is regarded superior to her. Being a husband is the sole reason of his superiority, and this demands that she must cower before him and serve him. This is what reflects in the form of address: wives not only serve their husbands physically but verbally as well.

It is also interesting to note that wives not only never use *t* form to their husbands but also do not like to receive *v* form from their husbands. They feel embarrassed if they are addressed with *v* form.

We said earlier that only one mutual form which is exchanged between Nepali couples is *Timi,* but it is almost non-existent: only a handful of couples use it.